

EDUCATION & LABOR COMMITTEE

Congressman George Miller, Chairman

Strengthening America's Middle Class

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Chairman Miller Statement on Head Start Reauthorization Conference

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Below are the prepared remarks of U.S. Rep. George Miller (D-CA), chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, for the House-Senate conference meeting on H.R. 1429, the Head Start for School Readiness Act.

I'd like to thank all of the Conferees for all of their hard work to bring us to this point. I am proud to say that we will have a bipartisan reauthorization of this important program.

I believe we have a very strong conference report before us that will reinvigorate Head Start and help more children arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed.

Head Start has been the premiere early education program in this country for more than 40 years. It has served more than 20 million children and families in that time.

Head Start remains a cornerstone in this country's efforts to close the achievement gap, combat poverty, and provide all its citizens with the opportunity to thrive.

Head Start's design has always been science-based. This reauthorization builds on that strong foundation by again turning to the best science to revitalize and improve the Head Start program.

Both Head Start and Early Head Start prepare our country's most disadvantaged children to succeed in school and in life by addressing all of their needs. Head Start provides health and nutrition services, parent education, and a strong educational curriculum.

Head Start works closely with parents, empowering them to support their child's development and become involved with their education.

Recent findings from the Congressionally-mandated Impact Study found that after less than one year, Head Start narrowed the achievement gap by 45 percent in pre-reading skills and 28 percent in pre-writing skills. Another large study found that Head Start graduates continue to gain ground after they leave Head Start.

By the end of kindergarten, Head Start graduates were "essentially at national norms in early reading and writing" and had further narrowed the achievement gap in vocabulary, general knowledge and early math.

I am encouraged that research concludes that Head Start is doing what we expect and demand that it should do – help prepare children to succeed in school. However, this research also shows us that there are ways we can improve Head Start, and I believe we accomplish that in the conference report before us.

This conference report will improve teacher and classroom quality by strengthening Head Start standards and supporting best-practices in the classroom. The report will require more Head Start teachers to have bachelor's degrees in early childhood development.

It requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to implement a classroom observation tool that will support better learning and teacher-child interactions.

It requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to re-evaluate and update the current early learning standards and use of assessment using the best available science and drawing from a forthcoming study from the National Academy of Sciences.

It improves the professional development and classroom practices related to children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

And it terminates further use of the badly flawed National Reporting System which cost over \$25 million dollars, took up valuable classroom time, and was not designed to be useful for improving program quality.

The conference report will also strengthen greatly program accountability at the federal, regional, and local levels to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being used wisely.

The report allows the Secretary to more quickly take funding away from bad programs and requires that new and detailed fiscal management protocols be included in program reviews.

And the report strengthens the focus and content of the triennial reviews and requires follow-up site visits of deficient programs.

The conference report will also make sure that every Head Start center operates at the highest level by introducing a new system of identifying low-quality programs and requiring them to re-compete for their grant.

The conference report expands access in many important ways. Early Head Start receives priority and a new conversion process is created so more infants and toddlers can attend Head Start during the years their brains are growing the fastest. And expansion of Migrant and Indian programs is prioritized so that these children have access to this important program.

This reauthorization will build on Head Start's past successes and integrate the best science and early childhood practices in order to provide Head Start children with a better future.

Thank you.